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AUTHOR Towner, Daniel R.
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ABSTRACT

Based on research selected from a search of the ERIC database, this literature review covers material that concerns academic achievement of retained students, social and psychological effects of retention, and recommendations for educators making retention decisions. After a definition of terms, 31 articles are extensively annotated. Most research suggested that retention did not significantly improve academic achievement. Existing data did not support competency-based promotions. Delay of school entry and use of special transition classes were ineffective in bolstering achievement scores. (RH)

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A Review of Research Literature on the Effects of Pupil Retention

by

Daniel R. Towner

Graduate Student

PS 017437

Study Directed
by
Charles R. DuVall, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	3
Organization of the Study	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Definition of Terms	5
Annotations	
Annotations: The Effect of Retention on Achievement	7
Annotations: The Social-Psychological Effects of Retention	17
Annotations: Recommendations and Considerations for Educators Making Retention Decisions	26
Summary	36
Conclusion	41
Recommendations	43
Bibliography	45

Introduction

Pupil nonpromotion is certainly not a new phenomenon in American education practices. It has been estimated that one half of all children were retained, at least once, between grades one through eight, in the early 19th century (Rose, et al., 1983). Since that time, educators have fluctuated in their views of retention and the concept of "social promotion." It has been approximated that, nationally, nearly six percent of pupils are retained annually (Rose, et al., 1983). However, research data collected for this study have not supported the widespread practice of nonpromotion to benefit low achieving, or immature children. Retention has not been shown to significantly raise achievement (Dobbs and Neville, 1967; Holmes, 1983; May and Welch, 1984; McDaniel, 1986), nor has it been conclusively demonstrated whether retention positively or negatively affects the social and emotional well-being of children (Finlayson, 1977; Plummer, 1982; Chansky, 1964; Godfrey, 1972).

Educators must be aware of the research data regarding student promotion and retention, and be able to incorporate those findings into their decision-making processes. Studies included in this review may aid in the understanding of the ramifications of pupil retention, and enable teachers to make educationally sound decisions based on the best available research data.

The research, however, is rather inconclusive as to the effects of retention on students' achievement, social-psychological welfare, and recommendations for educators. As Jackson (1975) has pointed out, there are relatively few properly designed studies on the topic of retention, and therefore, conclusive evidence is not readily available. Clearly, there is a need for further research on the implications of student retentions. The studies contained in this review were selected from an extensive search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and annotations of those studies are arranged alphabetically, by the authors' last names, within each section.

Statement of the Problem

Elementary retentions (grade repetition) must be carefully and thoroughly screened to determine if the nonpromotion of a student will result in higher achievement, positive social-psychological development, and contribute to overall school success.

Purpose of the Study

There is currently a trend toward competency-based education, and a decrease in the use of social promotions from grade to grade. Therefore, there is renewed interest in the effects of retaining students (Holmes, 1983; Holmes and Matthews, 1984). This study will enable educators to be more cognizant of the research findings regarding the nonpromotion of students. It is also the intent of this study to provide educators with decision-making considerations when faced with a potential retention case.

Organization of the Study

This study is an annotated bibliography of retention literature and has primarily been organized into three areas: a review of the research concerning the academic achievement of retained students, (2) the social-psychological effects of retention, and (3) research recommendations for educators to consider when contemplating a retention decision. The study also contains a summary of the available research data and conclusions drawn from the included studies.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the research available, in that many of the studies on the effects of retention were not properly designed (Jackson, 1975), and many studies were further limited by the inadequate samples used, e.g., Morrison and Perry, 1956; Cross, 1984. This study was also impaired by the lack of current, high quality research available.

Definition of Terms

ACHIEVEMENT - 1) accomplishment or proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge, 2) progress in school; theoretically different from intelligence but overlaps with it to a great degree. (Good 1973:7)

COGNITION - in general, the process of knowing; in particular, the process of knowing based upon perception, introspection, or memory. (Good 1973:113)

DEVELOPMENT, COGNITIVE - according to Piaget, development in the child's thought process through his adaptation to the environment and assimilation of information. (Good 1973:176)

EVALUATION CRITERIA - the standards against which a person, a group, a procedure, or an instrument may be checked. (Good 1973:220)

FAILURE, PUPIL - lack of success on the part of a pupil in the accomplishment of a school task, whether a small unit, such as an individual project, or a large unit, such as the work of a school subject or grade; often implies nonpromotion of the pupil. (Good 1973:234)

GRADE PLACEMENT - the allocation of pupils to a specified grade, year, or level of schoolwork; the assignment of certain learning experiences, books, or subjects to a particular, appropriate school grade. (Good 1973:263)

GRADE RETENTION - requirement that an elementary student repeat a grade level through a second school year; failure to be promoted to the next grade level. Also referred to as held back, repeating, nonpromotion, or failure. (Faerber 1984)

NONPROMOTION - failure of a pupil to be promoted to the next higher grade at a regular promotion period. (Good 1973:387)

PLACEMENT, STUDENT - the act of placing a person where he should be in accordance with his capabilities, aims, readiness, educational background, and aspirations. (Good 1973:424)

PROBATIONARY PROMOTION - an arrangement by which a pupil is promoted to the next higher grade on a trial basis in order that his progress and adjustment may be observed. (Good 1973:453)

PROMOTION - the act of shifting a pupil's placement from a lower to a higher grade. (Good 1973:453)

PROMOTION, INDIVIDUAL - promotion from one class or grade to another for an individual child at a time other than a usual promotion period. (Good 1973:453)

REMEDIATION - provision of information that enables a student to correct his/her performance during the teaching/learning process. (Page 1977:290)

REPEATER - a pupil who has repeated or is currently repeating the work of a grade or part of a subject at some designated level of difficulty. (Good 1973:490)

SELF-ACCEPTANCE - 1) seeing oneself as one really is; accepting and understanding one's interests, needs, and abilities; 2) seeing oneself as being accepted by others; being one of and conforming to the group. (Good 1973:524)

SELF-CONCEPT - the individual's perception of himself as a person, which includes his abilities, appearance, performance in his job, and other phases of daily living. (Good 1973:524)

SELF-CONFIDENCE - faith in one's own ability. (Good 1973:524)

SELF-CONSCIOUS - 1) having a tendency to be aware of the self when reacting or performing, especially in the presence of others; 2) having a tendency to pay attention to or be preoccupied with the reactions of others to oneself, particularly when these reactions are thought to be evaluative. (Good 1973:524)

SELF-ESTEEM - the judgment and attitude an individual holds toward himself. (Good 1973:525)

SELF-EVALUATION - making a judgment about oneself or some characteristic of oneself. (Good 1973:525)

SOCIAL PROMOTION - promotion to the next higher grade based upon factors other than achievement, e.g., age and size. (Owen and Ranick 1977:531)

TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS - the ability of the teacher to relate the learning activities to the developmental process of the learners and to their current and immediate interests and needs. (Good 1973:586)

TUTORIAL SERVICES - private instruction by a teacher or student to an individual or small group of students. (Good 1973:626)

UNDERACHIEVEMENT - academic achievement at a level below the one expected on the basis of the student's performance on general aptitude tests and in the classroom. (Good 1973:628)

UNDERACHIEVER - a person who falls below his capacity in school achievement. (Good 1973:628)

Dietz, Carol and Barry J. Wilson. "Beginning School Age and Academic Achievement." Psychology in the Schools 22 (1985): 93-94.

Dietz and Wilson studied 117 pupils enrolled in the West Delaware School District to ascertain if school age entry affected school achievement and subsequent grade retentions. The subjects were divided into three age groups: (a) mean of 62 months, (b) mean of 66 months, and (c) mean of 71 months at the time of school entry. Dietz and Wilson analyzed kindergarten readiness tests, standardized achievement test scores, and group ability test scores to determine if differences existed among the age groups. They found no significant differences in each of the test results; however, they did note that boys scored six months lower than girls in reading achievement, and on the composite scores. Furthermore, it was noted that "of 10 students who were retained at a later date, three were in the youngest group, six were in the middle group, and one was in the oldest group" (94). Therefore, Dietz and Wilson contended that requiring later school age entry will not thwart failure or grade retention rates. They concluded that "there is little or no effect on academic achievement that can be attributed to the birthday of a student. Students who were retained in grade did not tend to be among the youngest students..." (94).

Dobbs, Virginia and Donald Neville. "The Effect of Nonpromotion on the Achievement of Groups Matched from Retained First Graders and Promoted Second Graders." Journal of Educational Research 60 (1967): 472-475.

Dobbs and Neville conducted a study of 30 pairs of children from eight low socio-economic urban elementary schools. Each pair of pupils consisted of a retained first grade child and a never-retained second grade child. The pairs were matched by race, sex, socio-economic level, type of classroom assignment, age, mental ability, and reading achievement. Dobbs and Neville used the Lorge-Thorndike Group Intelligence Test and the Metropolitan Achievement Test to analyze achievement gains for each pair of pupils from 1962 through 1964. They found that "both the reading and mathematics achievement gains of the promoted group (never-retained) were significantly greater than the corresponding gains of the nonpromoted group" (473). Dobbs and Neville contended that promotion positively influenced achievement gains, while nonpromotion hindered such gains. Although this study was limited to white, low socio-economic children, the researchers felt that the results gave a clear indication that nonpromotion was not instrumental in raising achievement scores.

Elligett, Jane K. and Thomas S. Tocco. "The Promotion/Retention Policy in Pinellas County, Florida." Phi Delta Kappan 64 (1983): 733-735.

Following a new school board policy on promotion and retention, Elligett and Tocco conducted a study to determine the plan's effectiveness. The policy allowed promotion only on the basis of a standardized test score although consideration was given to the total school record. They analyzed and compared those pupils who were retained with those promoted. Initially, retentions rose to 12 percent, while the prior average was 4 percent. During the second year the number dropped to 8 percent. These researchers found that the retained pupils showed remarkable gains in test scores during the year of retention and the year following promotion. Although they have supported the new policy, Elligett and Tocco caution educators that the gains made by retained pupils can be attributable to three factors: "the retained students are repeating the same course of instruction for a second time, (2) they are retested at the end of the year on the same test (or on a parallel form) and (3) their raw scores are converted to percentile ranks and/or grade equivalents according to the norms for the grade they are repeating" (734). They further acknowledged that, with no valid control group, one cannot assume that the gains made were the results of a year of retention only.

Holmes, Thomas C. "The Fourth R: Retention." Journal of Research and Development in Education 17 (1983): 1-6.

Holmes, in this analysis of pupil retentions, extensively reviewed the data from eight studies to statistically demonstrate that nonpromotion did not improve achievement scores. He used only those studies which matched retainees with promoted pupils on the basis of achievement scores. In the analysis, Holmes used research from original studies to assess the effects of retention in the areas of reading, arithmetic, and language arts. He used the data to calculate the effect size (ES) in those areas. A synopsis of those findings follows: Coffield (1954) compared 147 seventh graders previously retained with pupils that had never been retained. Holmes states, "Of 128 analyses made, 43 showed significant differences favoring the promoted pupils, while three resulted in significant differences favoring retained pupils" (2). Dobbs and Neville (1967) studied 30 pairs of retained and promoted pupils. They found that "both the reading and mathematics achievement gains were much greater for the promoted group" (2). Koons (1968) followed 129 pairs of students. The promoted students were markedly higher on mean scores than the retained group in the first two years of that study. Five other studies (Mendenhall, 1933; Miller, 1978; Skelton, 1963; Worth, 1959; Carrie, 1960) all yielded similar results. Upon analyzing the data in the areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts, Holmes found the effect size always in favor of the promoted students. In reading, he found that retained pupils scored, on average, an ES of .46 standard deviation units lower than promoted pupils. He also found, in mathematics, a mean ES of -.45 for the retainees. In the area of language arts, Holmes found a mean ES for the retained pupils of -.36, showing that again they were .36 standard deviation units below their promoted counterparts. In conclusion, Holmes states, "It seems that retained pupils fall behind during the year that they are retained and spend the rest of their academic careers in vain attempt to catch up" (4).

Jackson, Gregg B. "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention." Review of Educational Research 45 (1975): 613-635.

In a comprehensive review of the research literature on the effects of grade retention, Jackson found few studies which were free of serious design defects. He analyzed 44 studies for the purpose of determining if pupils benefitted more from retention or from promotion to the subsequent grade. Jackson found that all of the studies reviewed could be placed in three design types. Type I studies compared retained pupils matched with promoted pupils, and the groups were matched by grade level, sex, chronological age, mental age, I.Q., grades, achievement test scores and adjustment indices. Type II studies compared the retained pupils before and after promotion. This design type only assesses the effects of retention. Type III designs compared pupils who experienced difficulty in school and who were randomly placed in a retention or promotion group. Jackson found this last design type can "provide a reliable test of the relative effects of grade retention and promotion on low-achieving or maladjusted pupils" (624). He found only three of the 44 studies were design type III. The results of those studies (Klene and Branson, 1929; Farley, 1936; Cook, 1941) favored promotion over retention based on achievement test scores only. Jackson concluded that no reliable results can be drawn from design type I and II studies. In type I studies, he found the "comparison is biased toward indicating that promotion has more benefits than retention because it compares retained students who are having difficulties with promoted students who usually are not..." (619). In design type II studies, Jackson found a "bias toward indicating that pupils benefit from grade retention because of the lack of control for possible improvement resulting from causes other than the retention experience itself. Consequently, ...this design fails to evaluate the benefits of retention" (623). In his conclusion, Jackson called for much more high quality research regarding the effects of retention. Despite its widespread use, research evidence on the effects of retention is thin. He summarizes, "Thus, those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits..." (627).

May, Deborah C., and Edward L. Welch. "The Effects of Developmental Placement and Early Retention on Children's Later Scores on Standardized Tests." Psychology in the Schools 21 (1984): 381-385.

In many school districts nationwide, the Gesell Screening Test is used to determine the proper school placement for a child by assessing the child's developmental age (D.A.). May and Welch conducted a study to analyze the appropriateness of such placements. Their study included 223 children from a suburban, white middle-class school district. That particular district used the Gesell Screening Test to place pupils in one of three programs: "buy a year" (BAY) children spent an extra year before second grade, overplaced (OP) children were those who were assessed as developmentally immature, but due to parental request did not take an extra year before second grade, and the third group was determined to be developmentally mature and labeled traditional (TR). It should be noted that "the BAY children were nine months older than the OP group" (383). This study analyzed the data from the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Test, and the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). May and Welch found that "the TR group scored significantly higher on the PEP test than did the BAY group. There were no significant differences between the BAY and OP children, or between the TR and OP children" (384). Furthermore, they found the same to be true regarding the data from the SAT. The significance of this study includes the fact that although the BAY children were older and had spent an extra year before second grade, they achieved lower on the PEP and SAT tests than their promoted peers. It should also be noted that the OP children did serve as an adequate control group for they were assessed as being developmentally immature on the Gesell, but were promoted in spite of that. Clearly, the "extra year" before second grade did not significantly raise the achievement of the BAY children, and may have, in fact, retarded their academic growth.

McDaniel, Augustine. "The Long-Term Effects of the Pupil Progression Policy on Academic Achievement." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986), Eric Document #278 088.

McDaniel has analyzed the test data of a large urban school system to determine the academic achievement of retained pupils. The system had implemented a pupil progression policy in which children were retained if they failed to master basic skills in reading and/or mathematics, or did not progress through the basal reading series (5). McDaniel's five-year study was longitudinal and the data analyzed were normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores obtained from the California Achievement Test (CAT). He sought to answer four basic questions: "What was the progression status of students during the program? (2) Was the achievement of promoted students significantly higher than that of retained students? (3) Was there a grade level at which retention resulted in greater academic growth? (4) Did participation in the Chapter I remedial program, along with another year of regular classroom instruction, result in improved achievement?" (3) McDaniel found that over the five year period, 34 percent (1,125) of the school system's pupils were retained. The test data showed that "promoted subjects achieved significantly higher mean NCE scores on the CAT than retained students" (5). In total reading, the promoted pupils scored a mean NCE of 64.46 while the retainees scored a mean of 34.48. Promoted pupils scored a mean NCE of 68.31 on total mathematics while the retained group scored a mean of 41.13 (5). Promoted pupils scored significantly higher during the entire five year period from 1981-1985. Achievement gains made by retainees during that period improved in grades 1-3; however, scores leveled off at fourth grade suggesting little benefit of retention in the upper elementary grades. Of those pupils retained, 95 percent were receiving Chapter I services, and the data indicated that remedial instruction was beneficial to those pupils. The student population in McDaniel's study was homogeneous with 90 percent of the pupils black and 80 percent fell in the low socio-economic category (13). Nevertheless, he seriously questioned a school system's policy which retained 34 percent of its student population while given the fact that achievement scores did not significantly improve for those pupils.

Owen, Samuel A. and Deborah L. Ranick. "The Greensville Program: A Commonsense Approach to Basics." Phi Delta Kappan 58 (1977): 531-533, 539.

Owen and Ranick described, in this report, the philosophy, components, and implementation of an achievement-based promotion program in Greensville County, Virginia. Faced with poor achievement results, the system rid itself of age-based or "social" promotions and implemented mastery of skills in its place. Students were tested twice each year and the results of the S.R.A. Achievement Tests determined promotion or retention. In the first year (1973-74) the system retained 1,300 of the 3,750 pupils enrolled. However, Owen and Ranick contended that the number retained has declined each year since. They stressed that "no students would be promoted until they showed, on achievement tests, their mastery of the skills for their grade" (532). The program also included secondary courses for accelerated students, students who required more time for mastery, and an Occupational Proficiency Training program (OPT) for students who qualified. Owen and Ranick felt that the program has made a difference. They reported, "Third graders' scores have gone from 33 to 50 percent in reading, fifth graders from 25 to 60 percent in math and seventh graders from 26 to 64 percent in reading" (533). They also claimed their dropout rate has fallen from 121 in 1974 to 91 in 1976. They wrote, "Our goal is to enable each child to have the best possible education and...to have a diploma that stands for solid achievement" (539).

Peterson, Sarah E., et al. "A Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Retention/Promotion on Academic Achievement." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985), Eric Document #263 667.

Peterson's study focused on two questions: (1) how does the relative class standing of retained students compare with students not retained in the same year, and (2) how do retainees and non-retainees compare on grade level tests? Peterson analyzed the data from first, second, and third grade pupils from the Mesa Public Schools who were divided into two groups (retained and promoted). The groups were matched by sex, ethnicity, chronological age, and the total reading, grammar, and mathematics scores from recent California Achievement Tests. Using normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores, the two groups were compared during the three subsequent years following initial implementation of the study. Peterson found, at each grade level, that retained pupils scored significantly higher during the retained year than their promoted counterparts. However, by the third year of the study, the two groups showed no significant differences in cognitive achievement. She also found that following the year of retention, pupils quickly lost any advantage they had over their promoted peers. Peterson summarizes, "Our results seem to indicate that retention does not have a favorable long-term impact on academic achievement of primary students as measured by relative class standing" (15).

Rachal, Janella and Lee McGraw Hoffman. "The Effects of Remediation and Retention Upon Basic Skills Performance Among Elementary Students Participating in a State Basics Skills Test Program." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985), Eric Document #262 065.

Rachal and Hoffman conducted a three-year longitudinal study of 1,198 pupils to determine if retention was more effective at earlier grades than at later grades, and to determine if identification and remediation of skills deficiencies prevented later difficulties (15). The data for the study came from the Louisiana Basic Skills Testing (BST) program which consisted of criterion-referenced tests of language arts and mathematics. Rachal and Hoffman studied two groups of children: (1) those who were retained in second grade one year, followed by promotion to third grade, and (2) second graders who were promoted to third grade, but who were retained in third grade. The groups were matched according to the study's guidelines, and all subjects were classified as regular education pupils. Following a three year analysis, Rachal and Hoffman found no statistical difference between the two groups. They stated, "In both mathematics and language arts, students who were promoted, and then retained showed slightly higher performance after two years than students who were retained and then promoted" (6). The researchers also found that remedial services played an important role in raising student achievement. Rachal and Hoffman concluded that "in the long run, it makes little difference whether students who fail to master second grade basic skills are retained in second grade or promoted to third grade and then later retained" (14).

Schuyler, Nancy B. "Does Retention Help? Perspectives After Three Years." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985), Eric Document #263 143.

The Austin Independent School District Office of Research and Evaluation (AISD-ORE) conducted a three year study evaluating the effects of student retention in their district. The study was led by Schuyler who found that Hispanics, blacks, males, free lunch participants, and first graders were most likely to be retained. Most retainees tested under the 31st percentile, and, "on the average, students gained about .85 of a year in reading and .65 of a year in mathematics during the year repeated" (3). Furthermore, Schuyler found that there were no particular characteristics which predicted success. She did note that teachers of successful retainees identified problem areas, devised individual plans to assist the pupil, and generally aided the pupil with a multitude of tactics. The research indicated that retention bolstered achievement test scores in 29 percent of the cases (35/121). However, parents and teachers felt that 58 percent of the retainees had been successful. Schuyler pointedly states that "the question which can never adequately be answered is whether the child, given some extra help, could have been promoted and done as well or better" (6). In her conclusions she found that some pupils are helped by retention, although the number may vary based on the criteria used. Furthermore, the retention experience did not seem to help establish or maintain long-term achievement. Schuyler remarks, "Even if they (retainees) benefit in the short run, (they) cannot maintain the improved growth rate. Eventually, they end up as far behind as ever" (8). She suggests that more extensive studies are needed to explore alternative types of programs which could assist the low achieving pupils in the schools.

Chansky, Norman M. "Progress of Promoted and Repeating Grade 1 Failures." Journal of Experimental Education 32 (1964): 225-237.

Chansky studied 63 first grade pupils who were considered to be "at-risk" for retention. From this group, 30 children were promoted, and 33 were retained. In each group the ratio of boys to girls was three to one. He tested all pupils with the Stanford Binet Scale of Intelligence to determine mental age and IQ scores. He also used the California Test of Personality and the California Achievement Test. Every child was retested nine months after the initial testing. Chansky found that "promoted low achievers had significantly higher mental ages than the retained low achievers" (228). He also found that the promoted group scored much higher in achievement, but no difference was found between the groups on personality attributes. These attributes included self-reliance, self-esteem, and a feeling of belonging. According to Chansky, "The promoted group was significantly more able mentally and more skilled in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and mathematics reasoning" (228). Although both groups of pupils had adjustment difficulties, the promoted children achieved much better than their retained counterparts. Chansky concluded that questions of appropriate grade placement need further investigation. Furthermore, he recommended research in the areas of teacher-pupil interaction, interdependence among the pupil's academic skills, and pupil motivation for learning.

Finlayson, Harry J. "Nonpromotion and Self-Concept Development." Phi Delta Kappan 59 (1977): 205-206.

Hypothesizing that the nonpromotion of first grade pupils would negatively influence self-concept, Finlayson conducted a study from 1973 to 1975. His study included first grade pupils from two suburban school districts near Philadelphia, PA. The initial sample included 585 pupils; however, during the second year of the study Finlayson investigated three groups (nonpromoted, borderline, and promoted) containing 25 pupils each. The borderline group was selected by teachers as those who showed the same characteristics as the nonpromoted group, but who were promoted for various reasons. Finlayson used the FACES Scale (Jack R. Frymier, developer) to assess the self-concept of pupils on four separate occasions. According to Finlayson, "After nonpromotion the nonpromoted group of pupils continued to increase their self-concept scores significantly, while scores of the borderline and promoted groups dropped slightly" (206). He also found after the final measurement period (May, 1975) that the promoted and nonpromoted pupils had nearly identical scores with the mean of the nonpromoted group at 15.16 and a mean of 15.20 for the promoted group (206). Finlayson also conducted teacher and parent surveys to augment his data. He found that 84 percent of the nonpromoted group were viewed as having positive self-concepts by teachers. Teachers also viewed 96 percent of those pupils as developing more positive self-concepts. Seventy two percent of the parents felt their nonpromoted child was more successful and confident during the year repeated. Furthermore, 62.5 percent thought their child was happier during the nonpromoted year than during the previous year. Finlayson also discovered that most parents favored the decision of nonpromotion, and, given the chance, would make the same decision again. He concluded from his study that "it seems clear that...repetition of the first grade experience did not negatively affect the self-concept of the experimental primary grade pupils" (206).

Godfrey, Ernestine. "The Tragedy of Failure." Education Digest 37 (1972): 34-35.

Reporting from a North Carolina Advancement School study (1970), Godfrey found that 14 percent of the pupils in the North Carolina Public Schools had been retained once, while three percent had been retained more than once. The study analyzed test data from 1,200 sixth and seventh grade pupils from 14 schools. The results showed that pupils who had never been retained had a total reading score at a 6.8 grade level. Those pupils who were retained once read at a 5.2 level, and those who repeated more than one grade scored at a 4.5 grade level. It was also found that on mathematics achievement, retainees scored at least 17 percent lower than non-repeaters. The study also analyzed the self-concepts of retained pupils. The instrument used was the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and Godfrey reports, "On every sub-scale (10), students who had repeated grades scored lower than those who had not" (35). Godfrey concluded that retention did not significantly improve achievement scores of the retainees from the study, and may, in fact, have lowered the students' self-concepts. Therefore, she suggests the need for alternatives which meet the educational and psychological needs of the pupils.

Goodlad, John I. "Some Effects of Promotion and Nonpromotion Upon the Social and Personal Adjustment of Children." Journal of Experimental Education 22 (1954): 301-327.

The purpose of Goodlad's study was to determine if differences existed in the social and personal adjustment between promoted and nonpromoted pupils. Goodlad evaluated 73 nonpromoted children from six elementary schools and 150 children from five elementary schools who were borderline retainees, but were subsequently promoted. His assessment instruments included: the Kuhlmann-Anderson Tests, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, California Test of Personality, and the Haggerty-Olson-Wickman Behavior Rating Schedules. Goodlad also analyzed the sociometric findings from peer-rating data acquired from the study. He stated, "The promoted children tended to become more accepted as friends and less rejected as persons..." (312). From further analysis of the data on adjustment, Goodlad found that "the promoted group increased its mean score from 4.42 to 5.00; the nonpromoted group dropped from 4.94 to 4.71" (313). From the sociometric data, it was summarized that promoted children were more often named as desirable best friends than nonpromoted children. From all data collected, Goodlad concluded that, indeed, there were differences in social and personal adjustment between the two groups of children, for those promoted had more favorable scores. He feels that retention decisions should be critically analyzed before such decisions are made, and that decisions should not be based solely on achievement or intelligence. According to Goodlad, educators should ask the following question: "Is nonpromotion more likely to facilitate the all-around development of this child?" (314) If the question cannot be answered positively, then the child should be promoted.

Holmes, Thomas C.,and Kenneth M. Matthews. "The Effects of Nonpromotion on Elementary and Junior High School Pupils: A Meta-Analysis." Review of Educational Research 54 (1984): 225-236.

Holmes and Matthews, using the valid technique of meta-analysis (pooling, in a systematic manner, the original data from studies, Light and Smith 1971), have mathematically calculated the effects of retention on: (a) academic achievement, (b) personal adjustment, (c) self-concept, (d) attitude toward school, and (e) attendance. They used 44 studies in their investigation which consisted of 18 published studies, 14 dissertations, and 12 master's theses. This meta-analysis was based on effect size (ES) which is defined as the "difference between the mean of the retained group and the mean of the promoted group, divided by the standard deviation of the promoted group" (Glass 1978). Holmes and Matthews calculated 575 individual effect sizes. The overall ES was .37 standard deviation units lower for the nonpromoted group of pupils. A statistical analysis of their results follows: academic achievement- mean ES of -.44, personal adjustment- mean ES of -.27, and attitude toward school- mean ES of -.16. All ES scores listed are for the retained group of pupils as compared to those pupils who were promoted. Holmes further stated that "the findings are remarkably consistent when the data are examined from several research perspectives" (232). He also purported that "differences in the designs of the studies resulted in no significant amount of bias in the results" (232). All of these research studies indicated that negative effects for retained pupils far outweigh any benefits.

Jawarski, Anne P. and Stephanie M. Riley. "When Curriculum Does Not Match Readiness." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31- April 4, 1985), Eric Document #265 947.

Jawarski and Riley conducted a four-year longitudinal study evaluating the effects of utilizing a "growth year" for children who are socially and emotionally immature for kindergarten. Those children, according to Jawarski and Riley, are "likely to have difficulty sitting still in a structured classroom setting, paying attention to the task assigned by the teacher, or interacting appropriately with the other children" (2). They felt these children may ultimately face failure even though there may be no cognitive deficits. Their study contained 500 subjects representing a variety of districts from Michigan. The children were placed in one of three groups: (a) children who were recommended to have a growth year prior to kindergarten, and who followed the recommendation, (b) children recommended for a growth year, but did not follow the recommendation and entered kindergarten, and (c) a randomly selected control group selected from children in groups A and B. In the spring of each of the four years, Jawarski and Riley solicited responses to three questionnaires; a separate questionnaire was given for parents, teachers, and children in the study. The questionnaires were designed to examine adjustment, achievement, and developmental placement. The results of the parent questionnaire indicated that 88 percent felt they made the right decision in placing their child for a "growth year." Ninety three percent of the parents would recommend a "growth year" to neighbors with similar children. Eighty four percent of the parents felt their child got along well with other children, and 49 percent said their child "felt good" about school. Forty six percent of the children saw themselves as being very good in class, while 70 percent said they were sometimes the leader. Fifty four percent of the teachers indicated that these children had many friends, and 76 percent thought the behavior of these children was within the usual range. The teachers also indicated that 78 percent of the children had good self-concepts. Jawarski and Riley concluded that a "growth year" may indeed help these "at risk" children establish a positive start in school as opposed to later retentions and failure.

Morrison, Ida E. and Ida F.Perry. "Acceptance of Overage Children by Their Classmates." Elementary School Journal 56 (1956): 217-220.

Morrison and Perry, in each of their separate studies, found overage children to be less socially accepted by their classroom peers. Morrison studied 177 fifth and sixth graders in five separate classrooms in Santa Barbara County, California. She identified 21 overage children who were defined as being a year or more older than the median age for their classes. Morrison surveyed the children through a questionnaire asking them to identify three friends for play, school work, and to take home for a party. Upon analyzing the sociometric status of the overage students, she found that of the 21 children "none was found in the highest sociometric quarter of his class. Furthermore, three children were found in the second quarter, six in the third, and twelve in the fourth quarter of the class. Overall, 86 percent of the overage children were below the medians of their group" (219). The Perry study was conducted in the same manner. Using a subgroup of 128 students, with ten of them overage, Perry found 90 percent were below the median sociometric status for their classes. Both Morrison and Perry concluded that "in general, a definite degree of nonacceptance for overage children was found" (220). Therefore, they advocate keeping a student with his own age group. Although the samples used in these studies were small, a general conclusion may be drawn. Clearly, further research is needed in the area of the acceptance of overage students by peers in the classroom.

Plummer, Diane L. "The Impact of Grade Retention on the Social Development of Elementary School Children." Thesis, published by the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 1982, Eric Document #222 275.

Plummer studied 219 children from second and fifth grade classes in a rural elementary school in northeast Georgia. Forty six percent of the children had been retained, while 54 percent had never been retained. The children in the sample included 34 percent black and 65 percent white. Plummer used a variety of tests to measure self-esteem, allocation of tasks, social partner choice, task partner choice, impressions/attitudes, and report card expectancy. She found that 67 percent of the participants were able to distinguish between promoted and retained children. It was noted that the older (fifth grade) children were much more critical of those retained than the younger (second grade) children. Plummer suggested that "the children's evaluations of their retained and non-retained peers were moderated by (a) the size (height) of the retained-target child, (b) whether or not the raters themselves had been retained, and (c) the grade of the raters" (44). Furthermore, it was found that 55 percent of the participants preferred to play and socialize with non-retained children. Plummer also concluded that data existed to indicate that retained children had experienced discrimination from their peers. However, it was equally evident from the data that "children who had been retained had a significantly higher 'actual' self-concept than the non-retained children" (48). These retainees seemed to be more comfortable with their work level, and many had experienced academic success, thereby raising their self-esteem.

Shepard, Lorrie A. and Mary Lee Smith. "Boulder Valley Kindergarten Study: Retention Practices and Retention Effects." Boulder Valley Public Schools, CO, March 1985, Eric Document #282267.

In a review of the data from 44 kindergarten classrooms, Shepard and Smith revealed that very little consistency on retention standards existed throughout the district. Retention rates ranged from 0 to 38 percent, and most teachers emphasized academic and maturity factors as the most common reasons for retention. However, Shepard and Smith noted that low readiness scores, being among the youngest in class, and being male also put children at a much greater risk of being retained. According to the authors, "Some teachers...considered age and sex more heavily in making a recommendation to repeat even if these were not as relevant to expected success in first grade" (188). The data from the study further demonstrated that neither academic nor social-emotional benefits were gained by retaining immature children. Shepard and Smith concluded that two-year kindergarten programs which include retentions, transition classes, and pre-kindergarten classes were not effective in solving achievement difficulties.

Walker, Elaine M. and Serge Madhere. "Multiple Retentions: Some Consequences for the Cognitive and Affective Maturation of Minority Elementary Students." Urban Education 22 (1987): 85-102.

Evaluating cognitive and affective test scores from a sample of 1,292 pupils (mostly black and Hispanic), Walker and Madhere analyzed the effects of multiple retentions. Data from the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Rank Test, and the Mann Whitney U Test indicated that multiple retentions did not increase cognitive development nor enhance the affective development of these children. In the study, retainees were placed in two groups: regular classroom setting with promoted peers, and a homogeneous group of only retained pupils. Walker and Madhere's data demonstrated that retained children in regular classrooms developed better affectively and socially, but they dropped cognitively. The homogeneous group showed higher cognitive development, but showed a decline in affective and social development. The authors noted that "the multiple retainee is still not able to make the academic and affective adjustments necessary to ensure cognitive success" (99). Furthermore, they concluded that "simply retaining a child every time he or she fails to meet the standard is no way of ensuring that academic succers will be his or hers" (101).

Byrnes, Deborah and Kaoru Yamamoto. "Views on Grade Repetition." Journal of Research and Development in Education 20 (1986): 14-20.

Byrnes and Yamamoto surveyed parents, teachers, and principals to determine their views on grade repetition. The study was conducted in a large southwestern school system which enrolled 26,000 elementary pupils. The respondents included 1,063 parents, 145 teachers, and 35 principals. The questionnaires were distributed evenly among parents from higher and lower socio-economic status (SES), as well as English and non-English speaking parents. It solicited responses to three general questions: opinions of retention in general, appropriate reasons for retention, and who should have the final say on retention decisions? Principals and teachers were further asked about alternatives to retention and the characteristics of children retained. In their findings, Byrnes and Yamamoto discovered that 65 percent of the teachers, 74 percent of the principals, and 59 percent of the parents felt "that children should usually or always be retained (if they do not meet the minimum criteria)" (18). Furthermore, it was found that options to retention such as smaller classes, more individualized instruction, remedial instruction, flexible entry age, transitional maturity classes, and multi or non-graded class structures received favorable support among 50-80 percent of teachers and principals unless the measure disrupted the school structure. The study revealed that despite the fact that there is a lack of research evidence supporting pupil retention (Jackson 1975), it continues to be prevalent in schools. The authors blamed our current school structure of "age determines grade" as contributing to failure in school. They advocated a sincere effort to end retention policies and seek educationally sound alternatives.

Caplan, Paula J. "The Role of Classroom Conduct in the Promotion and Retention of Elementary School Children." Journal of Experimental Education 41 (1973): 8-10.

Following an analysis of the data from her study, Caplan concluded that classroom behavior did influence retention/promotion decisions for girls. She analyzed and compared the behavior grades of 85 children in her study. She compared those grades for boys and girls, repeaters, and for those promoted. Caplan found that 50 children could be identified by behavior grades alone, and that it was possible to classify the two groups (repeaters and those promoted) by their behavior grades. Promoted girls were found to have significantly better behavior than those girls who were retained. Caplan found no such difference among promoted and retained boys. She attributed these results to the idea society has that girls should not act aggressively or disruptively, while such behavior is expected from boys. Therefore, lower achieving girls who acted aggressively or disturbed the classroom seemed to be at greater risk of nonpromotion. Caplan concluded that classroom conduct may not be the only factor in student retention; however, she did feel it influenced teacher decision-making of such cases, especially for girls.

Cross, Ray. "Teacher Decision-Making in Student Retention." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984), Eric Document #252 930.

Cross, in this report, examined the criteria which teachers used in making retention/promotion decisions. Having realized there are no criteria which are accepted universally, he investigated a first and second grade school in southern Texas. Cross felt that "the teacher seems likely to be the pivotal figure in student retention/promotion decisions; therefore, the teacher's criteria for making decisions to recommend a student for retention would seem to be a matter of some importance" (2). His study was designed to look at three questions: what criteria are used by teachers, (2) are these criteria common among teachers, and (3) are recommendations for retention related to objective standardized test measures? Following an interview with ten teachers, Cross recorded the following data as reasons for recommending student retentions: immaturity was listed as the reason in eight cases, pupil did not know a specific reading skill was listed in three cases, and not completing the primer or not progressing beyond the readiness level was each listed once. It was noted by Cross that "immaturity" was ranked highly as a criterion; however, that seemed to be based on teachers' observations of pupils' behaviors rather than on academic achievement. He also studied reasons for teachers <u>not</u> recommending pupils for retention. Those reasons included: "a recent spurt, too old/large, anticipated lack of parent cooperation, and potential discipline problem if retained" (6). Cross also examined achievement test scores for those students who were to be retained and for those who were considered, but <u>not</u> recommended, for retention. Analyzing results from the Mann Whitney U-Test and the Metropolitan Achievement Battery, he found no significant differences between the two groups. This led Cross to conclude that "whether a student is promoted or retained may depend as much on which district or school the student attends as on his rate of progress" (1). He clearly recommended the need for a rational, standardized criteria for retention in order to provide for more equality in those decisions.

Graham, Donna R. "An Investigation of Teachers' and Administrators' Decision-Making Behaviors and Attitudes Concerning the Promotion and Retention of Elementary Students." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982), Eric Document #215 433.

Graham interviewed first through sixth grade teachers and administrators at two District of Columbia Public Schools to assess their attitudes concerning the retention/promotion guidelines. She found that many respondents felt that the district's policy emphasized academic achievement, but also looked at chronological age, mental ability, availability of special services, physical maturity, and social/emotional adjustment. These factors had been part of the school district's retention policy since implementation of a competency-based curriculum. Graham's study used a qualitative/quantitative approach. Through her face to face interviews with the subjects, she found the following problems which hindered the uniform application of the policy: teachers were not sure how to implement the policy in the classroom, additional support personnel were needed, all guidelines were not in place before implementation, report cards did not fit new guidelines, and additional staff development was needed for explanations. A major hindrance to proper implementation of the retention/promotion policy was the lack of clarity. Therefore, teachers and administrators applied their personal interpretation of the policy in making such decisions. Teachers were not confident in using the policy and standards established due to a lack of understanding. Graham recommended that if a retention/promotion policy is used by a school district, the following ingredients are necessary for success: (a) the policy must be mutually developed by all parties involved, (b) staff development must be given to insure understanding of the policy, (c) the policy and procedures should be tested in a pilot study, (d) there must be constant input from the teachers implementing the plan, (e) the policy should be introduced incrementally beginning in first grade, and (f) remediation and support personnel are needed to facilitate the policy. A retention/promotion policy cannot be vague and unclear, according to Graham, but rather, clear, specific, and well-defined if it is to be successful in benefitting pupils.

Lieberman, Laurence M. "A Decision-Making Model for In-Grade Retention (Nonpromotion)." Journal of Learning Disabilities 13 (1980): 40-44.

Lieberman provided a comprehensive review of the factors which should be considered in retention decisions. His model is divided into three broad categories: child factors, family factors, and school factors. Under child factors, Lieberman suggested looking at physical disabilities, physical size, academic potential, psychosocial maturity, neurological maturity, child's self-concept, child's ability to function independently, grade placement, chronological age, previous retentions, nature of the problem, sex, chronic absenteeism, basic skill competencies, peer pressure, and the child's attitude toward retention. In all of these sub-categories, Lieberman stressed that educators must look at all factors rationally. For example, can the child function independently? If a child needs close supervision or small group interaction, retention may not be appropriate. He stated, "Retention should never be substituted for special education or represent disciplinary action" (41). In the area of family factors, Lieberman highlighted the following considerations: geographical moves, foreign language emigrants, attitude toward retention, and the age of siblings and sibling pressure. As Lieberman stated, "Retention implies a flaw that can easily develop into a social stigma in the eyes of the parents of the retained child" (43). Under this model, the school factors included: school system attitudes toward retention, attitudes of the principal and teacher toward retention, availability of special education services, availability of other programmatic options, and the availability of personnel.

Light, H. W. "Light's Retention Scale." Academic Therapy Publications, San Rafael, California, 1981, Eric Document #191 895.

Light's Retention Scale is a tool used by teachers to determine if a child would be suitable for retention. Light included 19 categories of data for the scale: the student's sex, age, school attendance, intelligence, present level of academic achievement, physical size, siblings, previous retention, history of learning disabilities, attitude about possible retention, parents' school participation, motivation to complete school tasks, history of delinquency, knowledge of the English language, present grade placement, transiency, emotional problems, experiential background, and immature behavior. A simple rating scale is used in each category, and the total score is the sum of all areas. Although the scale has been criticized on its lack of content validity (Vasa, et al. 1984), Light contends it does provide an approximate measure of retention appropriateness; however, he cautions that it should not be used as an exact tool.

Niklason, Lucille B. "Nonpromotion: A Pseudoscientific Solution." Psychology in the Schools 21 (1984): 485-499.

Niklason conducted a study of two school districts in Utah. She chose one urban and one suburban district. Each district had a different philosophy on retention. The suburban district was cautious regarding retentions while the urban was rather proretention. Niklason sought to answer these questions: "(a) What are the actual retention practices in the two districts? (b) How do the children recommended for retention compare with a control group of children in these districts? (c) What are the effects of retention compared to promotion on these academically similar functioning children?" (492) In an effort to answer question (a), Niklason surveyed 898 teachers on their retention philosophy and policies. In the suburban district, 99 teachers recommended 145 pupils for retention, while the urban district recommended 532 pupils from 183 teachers. She also found that 199 teachers clearly favored retention, while 39 were clearly opposed. It was noted that boys and minorities were overrepresented according to their numbers, and "poor academic achievement was the reason given most often for recommending retention" (493). The second most popular reason was immaturity, although no teacher could clearly define it. In comparing pupils recommended for retention with a control group, Niklason used 212 students. Each child was given intellectual ability tests and the California Test of Personality (CTP). Following a comparison of the two groups, it was found that the recommended-for-retention pupils were significantly lower statistically. Niklason also gave a series of tests to determine the academic achievement between the two groups. She found "no statistically significant differences existed...in verbal intellectual ability or in academic achievement. However, in performance ability, and in personal and social adjustment, the promoted children scored significantly higher than did the retained" (495). She concluded that educators are basing retention decisions on very little research evidence, and without such evidence to support retentions, Niklason felt they should decrease in number.

Sandoval, Jonathan. "Repeating First Grade: How the Decision is Made." Psychology in the Schools 21 (1984): 457-462.

Sandoval set out, in this study, to determine if there was a certain group of children who should be retained. He was most interested in analyzing the data and discovering if there was a particular "type" of child who would benefit from nonpromotion. He studied 146 first grade pupils from six school districts in northern California. Of those students, 84 were retained and 62 were promoted. The decision of retention was based on three factors, according to Sandoval: (a) the opinion of the classroom teacher, (b) the discretion of the school principal, and (c) in the majority of the cases, parental consent. He further added that "children were not retained when parents strongly opposed the retention decision" (458). Sandoval also found that 60 percent of the retainees were boys, and 25 percent were black or Hispanic. Both promoted and retained subjects were assessed using the following tests: Wechsler Intelligence Scale, Piaget-derived tests of cognitive development, California Achievement Test, Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration, and the McDaniel-Piers Young Children's Self-Concept Scale. He also measured height and weight. Sandoval analyzed nine immaturity variables to form subgroups of pupils. He found that "children retained appear to have been so on the basis of academic incompetence, low cognitive development, and low visual-motor skills; they were no different from peers with respect to size, self-concept, IQ, social skills, or age" (461). Sandoval concluded that schools must consider many facets before retention decisions are made; however, he felt retention was a crude intervention, and schools must know much more about matching pupils with appropriate curriculum.

Stroup, Stinson W. and Perry A. Zirkel. "A Legal Look at the Retention/Promotion Controversy." Journal of School Psychology 21 (1983): 213-217.

Stroup and Zirkel provided a review of the legal ramifications surrounding school retention/promotion practices. Although few court cases were available on the topic, litigation results indicated that schools should establish retention/promotion policies which use multiple criteria, avoid radical changes, and do not disproportionately affect any single minority group. In the case of Sandlin v. Johnson (1981), where a second grader was retained for failure to complete a reading series, a federal court of appeals found that "decisions by educational authorities which turn on evaluation of the academic performance of a student as it relates to promotion are...particularly inappropriate for review in a judicial context (4th Circuit Court of Appeals, 1981)" (214). Therefore, Stroup and Zirkel maintained that in avoidance of educational malpractice, school personnel should "base such decisions (retention/promotion) on multiple traditional criteria, and individualized academic judgment" (217). They found that the courts will generally support the schools' authority regarding academic decisions when such decisions are rendered in good faith by utilizing professional judgment. The following is a list of related cases: Bernard v. Inhabitants of Shelbourne (1913), Board of Curators of the University of Missouri v. Horowitz (1977), Peter W. v. San Francisco Unified School District (1976), Aubrey v. Philadelphia School District (1981), Debra P. v. Turlington (1981), and Anderson v. Banks (1981).

Vasa, Stanley F., Frederick C. Wendel, and Allen L. Steckelberg. "Light's Retention Scale: Does It Have Content Validity?" Psychology in the Schools 21 (1984): 447-449.

Vasa, et al. investigated the content validity of Light's Retention Scale (LRS) (Light, 1981). LRS contains 19 criteria which are rated from one to five to help determine candidates for retention. According to Vasa, "Light provides no psychometric evidence of the reliability or validity of the scale" (447). Furthermore, he purports, "The author (Light) provides no evidence of predictive validity, which is important, since the scale is used to predict the success of retained students" (447). In Vasa's study, 325 school personnel from 200 schools representing urban, suburban, and rural districts in the midwest were asked to respond to a survey. The survey listed 12 of Light's 19 criteria, and the respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point scale, the extent of the use of each criterion in deciding retention cases. Vasa found that three factors were used by less than 25 percent of the respondents: physical size, sex, and siblings. Furthermore, he found that over 50 percent of the respondents heavily weighted only three other criteria: school attendance, academic achievement, and motivation. Vasa remarks, "(Light's study) would seem to substantiate a lack of content validity for the LRS" (448). He further contended that the LRS should not be used as a nonpsychometric counseling instrument without further research evidence of content validity. Vasa concluded, "Caution should be employed in using the scale for any purpose directly related to predictions or decisions about student performance and retention" (449).

Summary

It should be noted that many studies in the literature on pupil retention had serious design defects (Jackson, 1975). As Jackson has pointed out, many studies were design type I and type II. Type I studies compared retained pupils matched with promoted pupils, and type II studies compared individual pupils before and after retention. Jackson concluded that these designs cannot produce reliable results as there are biases inherent in each type. There were few design type III studies in which low achieving pupils were randomly assigned to be retained or promoted.

Most of the available research suggested that retention did not significantly improve academic achievement. Dobbs and Neville (1967), in their study of 30 pairs of children, found that retention did not improve reading or mathematics scores. McDaniel, in his 1986 study, found that over a five year period, retained pupils achieved significantly lower on mean NCE scores than their promoted counterparts. Peterson (1985) also found that retention did not raise achievement over a long period of time. She found that any increased achievement from the retention experience diminished within two years. Furthermore, Holmes (1983), in his analysis of the data from eight studies, found that promoted pupils scored markedly higher on mean scores than the matched retained pupils.

It has also been suggested that delaying school entry or utilizing "special" transition classes would bolster achievement scores. However, research indicated that such policies and programs were ineffective (Dietz and Wilson, 1985; Shepard and Smith, 1985; May and Welch, 1984). Establishing an older entrance age or providing children with an extra remediation year did not appear to reduce underachievement or the number of retentions. However, regular promotion coupled with intensive remedial services has been shown to increase academic achievement in low ability pupils (Rachal and Hoffman, 1985; Koons, 1977).

Elligett and Tocco (1983) cautioned that, in studies in which retained students showed significant achievement, the results may have been attributed to three factors: pupils are covering the same material for a second year, at the end of the retained year they are evaluated by the same achievement test or a parallel form, and their scores are normed to the grade they are repeating. Therefore, unless these variables are controlled, the resulting data may be unreliable.

The research studies provided mixed results regarding the social and psychological effects of retention. Finlayson (1977), Plummer (1982), and Jawarski (1985) all found that retention did not negatively affect the emotional health of children. In fact, Plummer found that retained pupils had higher self-concepts than promoted pupils. Furthermore, it was discovered that parents and teachers sensed an increase in the retained children's self-concepts (Finlayson,1977; and Jawarski, 1985). Chansky (1964) also found that

there was no difference in personality attributes between promoted and retained children as measured by the California Test of Personality. Those attributes included self-reliance, self-esteem, and a feeling of belonging.

Other researchers found that retention negatively affected the social and affective development of pupils (Holmes and Matthews, 1984). In two studies conducted by Morrison and Perry (1956), it was demonstrated that there existed a general nonacceptance of overage children in the classrooms. The sampling in these studies was small; therefore, there is a need for current research in this area. Similarly, Goodlad (1954) found that retained pupils were less accepted as friends, and the pupils' adjustment scores dropped following the retention experience. In their meta-analysis of 44 studies in 1984, Holmes and Matthews discovered that retained children scored lower on affective measurements than promoted children. Specifically, they calculated a mean effect size of -.27 on personal adjustment and -.16 on attitude toward school for the nonpromoted group. Other studies have shown that low self-concepts, poor adjustment, and little social-emotional growth were evident among retained pupils (Godfrey, 1972; Shepard and Smith, 1985; Walker and Madhere, 1987).

Research has provided a number of considerations for educators to evaluate when determining the retention or promotion of a pupil. Lieberman (1980) has developed a comprehensive model for making

retention decisions, and Light's Retention Scale (1977) has been used as a "tool" to determine the appropriateness of retention for a particular child. However, these instruments must be tempered by professional judgment and not used as absolute guides (Vasa, et al., 1984).

Niklason found, in her 1984 study, that most teachers favored retention for pupils who demonstrated poor academic achievement. Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) also found that, in their study, 65 percent of the teachers, 74 percent of the principals, and 59 percent of the parents felt children should always be retained if they have not met a minimum criteria. It was also found, in the literature, that teacher opinions, principal discretion, and parent cooperation and consent played an important role in retention decisions (Sandoval, 1984; Cross, 1984). Furthermore, Caplan, in her 1973 study, discovered that classroom behavior was a significant factor in the retention of female pupils. She warned educators that conduct should not bias retention decisions.

School districts which have designed and implemented retention/promotion policies should adhere to certain guidelines. According to her study in 1982, Graham concluded that policies should be mutually developed, tested in pilot studies, receptive to teacher input, and should provide ample staff development opportunities if the policies are to be successful. These policies should also be developed with legal implications in mind. Stroup and Zirkel (1983) provided a review of court cases and decisions which have been handed

down from retention/promotion litigation. They have suggested that retention or promotion decisions be made using multiple criteria, making individualized academic judgments, avoiding radical policy changes, and avoiding policies which disproportionately affect minority students. These steps, according to Stroup and Zirkel, would reduce the chances of legal confrontations.

There is little doubt that the research on the effects of retention is mixed, and, at times, contradictory. However, it appeared that the nonpromotion of pupils did not likely improve academic achievement, and the action seemed to affect the social-psychological well-being of students. Research has, however, provided a number of sound recommendations for educators to consider when dealing with retention/promotion issues. With the widespread use of grade repetition, it seems clear that more properly designed studies are needed to aid educators in making professional judgments that will ultimately benefit children.

Conclusion

The available research indicated that grade retention is not likely to improve the academic achievement of children. Many researchers questioned the widespread use of grade repetition to improve achievement, while most research evidence did not support it (Jackson, 1975). Furthermore, as Schuyler states, "The question which can never adequately be answered is whether the (retained) child, given some extra help, could have been promoted and done as well or better" (Schuyler, 1985:6). That thought permeated much of the research literature.

It seemed clear that existing data did not lend support to those who emphasized competency-based promotions, e.g., Owens and Ranick, 1977. The research did not provide a rationale for educators and others who felt that two or more years at the same grade level with the same material would produce significant achievement gains. However, studies have indicated that regular promotion, with the assistance of remedial programs, enabled pupils to achieve greater success (Rachal and Hoffman, 1985).

The research provided mixed results as to the social and emotional effects of retention. Some researchers found no effect, or perhaps an increase in self-concept (Finlayson, 1977; Plummer, 1982), while others indicated there was a decline in self-concept and personal adjustment scores (Goodlad, 1954; Godfrey, 1972; Holmes and

Matthews, 1984). The fluctuation of data may have resulted from a number of variables including how the retention was handled, parents' cooperation and support, and whether or not the child developed a sense of failure.

Lieberman (1980) and Light (1981) provided educators with extensive models for making retention decisions. These models included broad lists of factors which should be evaluated before a retention recommendation is made. Others, including Sandoval (1984), Cross (1984), and Graham (1982), have evaluated the decision-making criteria used by educators to determine the appropriateness of grade repetition for an individual student. Those commonly used criteria included low standardized test scores, incompletion of the basal reading series, immaturity, incompletion of work, and poor work performance.

Many researchers concluded that the need exists for further studies on the effects of retention. Grade repetition is a common school practice and must be thoroughly investigated to assess its value. Educators should also continue to develop and implement programs which represent high quality education aligned with the needs of all pupils.

Recommendations

From the research literature available, it is recommended that:

1) Educators should carefully screen any candidate for retention to determine if grade repetition is the best possible course of action for the pupil.

2) Any retention decision should be based on multiple criteria; the decision should be free of any bias and not represent a disciplinary measure, e.g., behavior problems.

3) If retention seems necessary, it should be done as early as possible. Primary pupil retentions appeared to have more favorable results than later retentions (McDaniel, 1986).

4) Educators should consider the social-psychological impact retention will have on a pupil.

5) Consideration should be given to regular promotion coupled with a strong remediation program in place of grade repetition.

6) All alternatives should be explored to assist the low achieving pupil. These alternatives may include remedial services, probationary promotion, and a redesign of the curriculum to meet the child's needs.

7) School promotion/retention policies should be based on multiple criteria, avoid radical changes, and not disproportionately affect any minority group.

8) Educators should continuously evaluate curriculum guidelines to assure that such guidelines meet the needs and abilities of children.

9) School personnel should investigate, develop, and implement alternative strategies to grade repetition.

10) Further research is needed to evaluate the effects of retention on pupils' achievement and social-psychological well-being.

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